

Dianne Feinstein

1933–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

1992–



Image courtesy of the Member

DURING A PUBLIC CAREER SPANNING FOUR DECADES, Dianne Feinstein has merged her string of firsts as a woman politician with a reputation as an effective legislator whose political ideology is “govern from the center.” As California’s senior Senator, Feinstein holds key posts as the Ranking Member on the Judiciary Committee’s Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security Subcommittee and the Appropriations Committee’s Military Construction Subcommittee.

Dianne Emiel Goldman was born on June 22, 1933, in San Francisco, California, to Leon and Betty Rosenburg Goldman. She graduated with a B.S. from Stanford University in 1955. In 1960, California Governor Pat Brown appointed her to the state Women’s Board of Terms and Parole, where she served until 1966.¹ In 1962, she married Bert Feinstein, who died of cancer in June 1978. Several years later, Feinstein married investment banker Richard Blum. Her daughter, Katherine Mariano, is now a superior court judge in California. During the 1970s, Feinstein’s political star rose quickly. In 1969 she became the first woman elected to the San Francisco board of supervisors, serving from 1970 to 1978 and acting as board president for five of those years. The day she disclosed her intention to retire from the board, November 27, 1978, a supervisor assassinated Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk. Feinstein discovered the crime scene and found Milk’s body. She succeeded Moscone as the city’s first woman mayor and, the next year, won election to the first of two four-year terms. Feinstein earned national prominence as a tough-on-crime, pro-business mayor with a moderately liberal social agenda. Compelled to leave by the city’s two-term limit in 1988, she ran unsuccessfully for California governor in 1990 as the first woman on a major party ticket.

In 1992, Feinstein entered the special election for the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Republican Pete Wilson, who had won the governorship in 1990 and appointed an associate, John Seymour, to a two-year Senate term. Feinstein capitalized on the sentiment that women had been excluded from the political process. Her campaign paraphernalia proclaimed “Two percent is not enough,” a reference to the fact that only two of the Senate’s 100 Members were women. In the Democratic primary she handily defeated state controller Gray Davis and, in the general election, defeated

Seymour with 54 percent of the vote.² Feinstein took the oath of office on November 10, 1992, becoming the first woman to represent California in the U.S. Senate. Two years later, she won election to a full six-year term against Republican candidate Michael Huffington.

Senator Feinstein received assignments on the Appropriations, Rules and Administration, Select Intelligence, and Joint Printing committees. She also was one of a small group of women ever appointed to the Judiciary Committee. Most recently, she joined the Energy and Natural Resources Committee in 2001. When the Democrats controlled the Senate Chamber during the 107th Congress (2001–2003), Feinstein chaired the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government Information.

Senator Feinstein joined the moderate Senate New Democrats and the Centrist Coalition, becoming a strong proponent for issues such as women's reproductive rights, gay rights legislation, and gun control. One of her signal achievements was the passage of a ban on semi-automatic military weapons in 1994, the so-called Assault Weapons Ban. "I've lived a life that's been impacted by weapons," Senator Feinstein once wrote. "So this is not an esoteric, academic exercise for me."³ Also concerned with environmental issues, Feinstein successfully steered the California Desert Protection Act through the Senate—an unprecedented measure which placed more than 7 million desert acres into the Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks, as well as the East Mojave National Preserve. In 2000, she also authored the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which authorized \$300 million in federal money over 10 years to match California and Nevada conservation funds for the lake.⁴

Having lost her father and a husband to cancer, Senator Feinstein also has been a leader in the fight against the disease. She sponsored the Breast Cancer Research Stamp Act in the 1990s, raising more than \$50 million for research. In 2002, she introduced the National Cancer Act, which proposed the modernization and restructuring of national cancer policy.⁵ In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Senator Feinstein teamed up with Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas to author legislation creating the national "Amber Alert" system for missing children. With Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, Feinstein also won passage of the Victims of Violent Crimes Act, giving victims a core set of procedural rights under federal law and ensuring they have standing to assert their rights before a court. She sponsored the Combat Meth Act with Jim Talent of Missouri, which is now law, placing limits on the purchase of ingredients that can be used to manufacture methamphetamine. And she authored one of the first bills to help promote stem cell research, which offers hope to millions of people with catastrophic diseases. Feinstein won re-election to a second full term in 2000, defeating former U.S. Representative Tom Campbell with 56 percent of the vote.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Dianne Feinstein," <http://bioguide.congress.gov/>

Mikuski, Barbara, et al. *Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate* (New York: Morrow, 2000).

Morris, Celia. *Storming the Statehouse: Running for Governor With Ann Richards and Dianne Feinstein* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1992).

Roberts, Jerry. *Dianne Feinstein: Never Let Them See You Cry* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins West, 1994).

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

University of Oklahoma (Norman, OK), The Julian P. Kanter Commercial Archive, Department of Communication. *Film and Video Reels: 1971–1994*, one film reel and 29 video reels. Includes 67 commercials used during Feinstein's campaigns for the 1971 mayoral election in San Francisco, the 1990 gubernatorial, and the 1992 and 1994 U.S. senatorial elections in California.

NOTES

1 *Current Biography*, 1979 (New York: H.W. Wilson and Company, 1979): 130.

2 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.

3 Barbara Mikulski et al., *Nine and Counting* (New York: Morrow, 2000): 140.

4 "Official Biography of Dianne Feinstein," <http://feinstein.senate.gov> (accessed 12 December 2004).

5 *Politics in America 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2001): 64.